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ABSTRACT

Funding was received for a long overdue serious study of inner-city decay in Canada. Presented are the hypotheses and research methods for this projected study. The first policy challenge is providing evidence of the extent and seriousness of inner-city decay in Canada, particularly since urban difficulties are often presumed to be a problem in the United States rather than in Canada. The next policy objective is to gather data that can eventually be used to formulate recommendations for dealing with urban decay. The researchers plan to measure the extent of social isolation not only in the inner city but also in a sample of middle-income and affluent neighborhoods. An examination of crime is also important in a study of urban areas because it is a subject of great importance to the inhabitants of cities. The first formal hypothesis for the study is that extreme neighborhood poverty and disadvantage under conditions of social isolation are associated with high levels of crime. A second hypothesis is that Canadian inner-city neighborhoods are beginning to take on the characteristics of racial and social ghettoization. This hypothesis will be studied in Winnipeg (Manitoba). The third hypothesis is that inner-city social isolation is part of a wide process of isolation and exclusion that affects affluent neighborhoods as well as poor ones. The research will be based primarily on Statistics Canada census data and police records. Eventually, findings will be compared with information on some cities in the United States to gain a picture of the relative status of Winnipeg. (Contains 32 references.) (SLD)

INNER CITY DECAY, POVERTY, SOCIAL ISOLATION AND CRIME: A RESEARCH DESIGN

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1. Introduction

The decay of many inner city neighbourhoods in the United States is a well-recognized problem. Decay in Canadian cities, by contrast, has not received serious attention. Well-informed Canadians are aware of the parlous state of downtown Detroit, the South Bronx, certain neighbourhoods in Washington, DC, and so forth -- indeed sometimes perhaps more aware than Americans, given the penchant of Canadian media for shocked reports on doings south of the 49th parallel of latitude. Implicit in the shock is an assumption that things are different in cities north of the undefended border -- an assumption one might begin to question after a walkabout in the inner city of Winnipeg, Edmonton, Hamilton, in Vancouver's Downtown East Side, or Montreal's east end, to name only a few examples.

To be sure, the smugness is not without some justification. A wide-ranging literature finds Canadian political culture to be more oriented than American to state intervention in society and the economy.[1] A more extensive social safety net, and a less suspicious attitude toward government intervention in general and controls on urban development in particular may have contributed to the fact that the decay of Canadian inner cities is not as far advanced as that of the hardest-hit American ones.

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[1]Horowitz 1978, Frye 1982, Goldberg and Mercer 1986, Lipset 1990. Garber and Imbroscio (1992), in arguing that Canadian city politics offers the necessary conditions for the operation of growth coalitions, seek to turn the debate in a different direction, but do not dispute the findings cited here.

Yet, as Dennis Braithwaite, a Toronto newspaper columnist, once commented, all too often we find that our special Canadian virtues are nothing more than cultural lag. If Canadian cities are a bit more compact than American ones, and the social safety net a bit less insecure, nevertheless many of the symptoms of malaise so bleakly familiar to Americans are evident in Canadian cities as well. Urban sprawl, middle class flight to the suburbs, the isolation of the poor in inner city neighbourhoods, abandonment of houses, plummeting real estate values in downtown residential neighbourhoods, a growing fear of crime in general and street gangs in particular -- some or all of these ills will be unfamiliar to Canadian urban dwellers only if they refuse to look.

In short, serious study of inner city decay in Canada is long overdue, and we have received initial funding for a study that we hope will expand as it proceeds. In introducing it, we begin with an informal overview of what we hope to accomplish, and what conceptions we bring to our study, before proceeding, in subsequent sections of this paper, to a more formal presentation of our hypotheses and research methods. The ultimate objective of the overall study is to produce research of academic quality that is capable of playing a role in the policy process and in public education. At the same time, we are pursuing academic themes, which are intertwined with the policy objectives.

A look at the potential impact of research on inner city decay upon policy must begin with the fact, already noted, that many Canadians, including some academics and policy-makers, think of inner city decay as an American problem. Our first policy challenge, therefore, is that of providing evidence on the extent and seriousness of inner city decay in Canada. In our research, we will seek to develop measures of the seriousness of decay and associated problems in Canadian cities and, insofar as possible, compare those results with similar data from the United States. We are not far enough along in our research to know how much of a comparison with US cities will be feasible, but we have

roughed out the lines of questioning we will pursue in determining the status in Canadian cities, and these are set out below.

The next policy objective is to gather data that can, in the end, contribute to the formulation of recommendations for dealing with some of the elements of the decay problem. In order to see how these might be derived, we need to look at the conceptions underlying the lines of enquiry to be pursued. In addition to gathering information that bears on the character and extent of inner-city decay, we intend to explore the interrelationships among decay, poverty, social isolation and crime.

The literature on these themes is cited below, but, in keeping with our intention of introducing our study with an informal overview, we will begin by explaining them in common-sense terms -- even if some consider common sense to be uncommon, and others question whether there is any sense in it! Some of the literature cited below argues that the decay of inner city residential neighbourhoods in particular and poverty in general are exacerbated by social isolation.

In common-sense terms, it is not hard to see the rationale for these connections: however bad poverty is in any given circumstance, it seems bound to become worse if there is nothing but more poverty all around. Poor people living in neighbourhoods where better off people also reside are unlikely to be subjected to the intimidation of street gangs, and their children (and sometimes they themselves) are therefore less likely than the socially isolated poor to be faced with the Hobson's choice of becoming victims or accomplices. We are not arguing that it is impossible for socially isolated poor neighbourhoods to organize to defend their interests, only that special measures for protection of the community are more likely to be necessary and perhaps more difficult to implement. Likewise neighbourhoods where there is a mix of poor and better-off people are more likely to have

good schools than ones where only poor people reside. Good schools and safe streets, in turn, reduce the likelihood that the poverty of one generation will reproduce itself in the next.

All of this and more is covered in more formal terms in some of the sociology literature cited below, but we intend to draw on the planning literature to take the social isolation theme a step farther. While the sociology literature has, with considerable justification, tended to treat social isolation as one of the ways the poor are victimized by the rest of society, the planning literature has long made it clear that low-density, single-use suburban (and downtown) development constitutes a systematic encouragement and promotion of social isolation as a general social process at all levels of North American society.

It is not only the poor that are isolated. Zoning restrictions, as well as many of the conventions of real estate marketing, tend to promote the development of neighbourhoods in which the vast majority of any given person's neighbours are likely to have incomes close to her or his own. Nor are people segregated by income alone. Neighbourhoods, or groups of buildings, available exclusively for elderly people, young singles and couples, conventional families with children, and so forth, are also common. And of course, segregation by race or ethnicity is a long-standing and persistent feature of North American life.

In our study, we intend to measure the degree of social isolation, not only in inner city poverty districts but also in a sample of middle-income and affluent neighbourhoods. Data thus derived will help us in our policy studies. They will provide a basis, not only for asking the obvious question: whether single-use, socially homogenous urban development ought to continue to be promoted. They will also serve as a first step toward raising a much knottier question: If it is agreed that social isolation makes undesirable urban development policy, how can it be countered without encouraging

gentrification or otherwise diverting resources from the poor to better-off people? This question is being actively debated in the United States, but not in Canada.

If decay and social isolation are related in obvious ways, it is less obvious why crime should be given the prominence of a place in the title of this study. Once again, we make our case for this aspect of our study informally before turning to a more formal review of the literature. We believe crime is important to a study of inner city decay because it is important to many people who live in decaying neighbourhoods and -- perhaps as a result of a curious conjunction of circumstances at opposite ends of the political spectrum -- it is not being given the attention it deserves.

Even if we discount the more lurid reporting on inner city crime, it is clear, at least from newspaper accounts, that crime is a major concern for people living in decaying neighbourhoods. Numerous accounts testify to this: stories of school children being intimidated into joining street gangs, of heavily-armed drug dealers terrorizing residential streets, of people -- including children -- being caught in a drug-war cross-fire or an armed robbery and killed, of people choosing to sleep in bathtubs because they are bullet-proof, of schools requiring that their students pass through metal detectors, of inner-city merchants looking to motorcycle gangs for protection from street gangs.

However sensationalized some of these stories may be, their accumulation suggests that, for poor people living in socially-isolated inner city neighbourhoods, fear of crime is a major concern. Yet, as we show below, the academic literature has made little or no headway in exploring the relationships, if any, between poverty and crime. In part, this undoubtedly results from an understandable desire to avoid blaming victims -- those who find themselves at the bottom of a stratified society -- together with the knowledge that middle-class crimes are less likely to be detected and punished than the crimes associated with poverty.

However, keeping an aspect of the problem shouded, with good intentions or not, will not serve the purpose of finding realistic policy responses to the problems associated with inner city decay and social isolation. In any event, as we will show, our unit of study is not individuals but neighbourhoods. Our purpose is not to find out who is to blame for crime, but to find out which neighbourhoods are targetted, and to what degree.

With the limited research funds available to begin this project, our intention is to limit the first phase of our study to Winnipeg, but in the longer term we hope to expand the study to take in, first Vancouver, and then as many other Canadian cities as resources allow.

2. Research plans and methods, theoretical approach

Our research, including both short-term and long-term objectives, is intended to address two questions. Each question is formulated in such a way as to allow us to use the answers as a means of addressing chosen literatures. For each question, we have chosen appropriate research methods. In this section, we state the questions, explore their significance for the literature and outline the methods we intend to use in seeking answers.

2.1.0 Question One: poverty, social isolation and crime. In Winnipeg's case, what is the relationship between poverty, social isolation and crime rates? How badly or well has Winnipeg fared on these dimensions in comparison with American cities? Is race implicated in these social ills? If so, how?

American research has documented the growth of high poverty rates in cities since the 1970's. A literature that grows out of some of this research deals with the question of whether or not the stratum of society affected by poverty has assumed the proportions of a permanent underclass. (Jargowsky 1994, Morris 1994, massey and Denton 1993, Mincy and Wiener 1993, Jencks and

Peterson 1991, Wilson 1987) At the same time, a substantial literature on neighborhood crime has added much to our understanding, but has paid relatively little attention to the the effects of poverty, inequality, and other structural conditions on crime rates. (Anderson 1990, Bursik 1988, Crane 1991, Skogan 1990) However, some studies, dating back at least to 1986, have found a relationship between poverty on one hand and criminal victimization and re-offending on the other. (Bursik 1986, Bursick and Gramsick 1993, Curry and Spergl 1988, Messner and Golden 1986, Patterson 1991, Roneck and Maier 1991, Smith and Jarjoura 1988) A great deal of the literature on both poverty and crime has been descriptive, shedding much less light on the causes of poverty and crime than on the facts of their existence. This is particularly true of the relationship, if any, between poverty and crime. We intend to explore the relationship between poverty and vulnerability to crime.

A growing literature deals with the question of whether social isolation exacerbates the ills associated with poverty. (Wilson 1987, 1991, 1996); Wacquant and Wilson 1993; Rulli 1998; Holloway et al 1998, Van Kempen 1997; Marcuse 1997a, 1997b; Enchautegui 1997; Massey and Denton 1993; Mincy and Wiener 1993; Harrell and Peterson 1992) Another relationship that seems worth exploring, therefore, is the relationship between poverty and crime on one hand and social isolation on the other. Drawing on the social isolation literature, **our first hypothesis is that extreme neighborhood poverty and disadvantage under conditions of social isolation are associated with high levels of crime** because the conditions that encourage criminal behavior are particularly pronounced. Residents commonly witness criminal acts and, in conditions of near-universal poverty, the most attractive role models, especially to young people, may be those who have prospered from crime. Residents of Winnipeg have recently had opportunity to observe the operation

of such social mechanisms at close quarters, as a convention of outlaw motorcyclists in a socially-isolated North End neighbourhood drew the admiring attention of juvenile autograph-seekers.

It seems entirely plausible, therefore, to suggest, as Wilson, Wacquant do, that poverty and social isolation are interrelated, and that they are intimately connected with a range of other social ills, possibly including crime. Our study will determine whether this seemingly plausible relationship is in fact empirically verifiable in Winnipeg. Our methods are set out in Section 3 (Research) below.

Wilson and Wacquant (1989) go on to demonstrate that it is poverty and social isolation that are the salient determinants of crime, not race, even though racial exclusiveness is a prominent characteristic of ghettos, especially in the United States. Many Canadian commentators take the self-congratulatory view that racial exclusiveness is not a characteristic of Canadian inner-city neighbourhoods. By the same token, even a casual observer of Winnipeg's inner city will have seen many signs of racial sorting in the past decade or two, as Winnipeg has become a major centre of aboriginal population, with aboriginal people heavily concentrated in certain neighbourhoods.

Moreover, one of the principal investigators in the present study has personally observed at least one case in which a real estate agent sought to pressure residents of a neighbourhood into panicked selling of their homes by spreading a story that aboriginal people were moving in. Such pressure is well known to Americans as "block-busting" and it is a standard feature of the creation and expansion of racial ghettos. It is possible, therefore, that **Canadian inner city neighbourhoods are beginning to take on the characteristics of racial, as well as social ghettoization. This is the second hypothesis that we intend to subject to an empirical test** in the case of Winnipeg.

Our first two hypotheses are products of our intention of building on the sociological literature on social isolation. A third hypothesis grows out of difference of emphasis between our

proposed study and that literature. Sociologists studying social isolation have tended to focus much of their attention on poor neighbourhoods. In the case of Wacquant and Wilson (1993), "low-poverty" areas of Chicago are included in their study only as a means of establishing the comparative poverty and the social isolation of the poor, inner-city neighbourhoods that are the focus of their attention. They do not treat these areas as worthy of study in their own right.

However, anyone who is familiar with the conventions of city planning knows that social, and sometimes racial, exclusiveness is not a preserve of inner city neighbourhoods. Indeed, a prime objective of standard zoning by-laws and ordinances across North America is the enforcement of social uniformity, and everyday political action in suburban neighbourhoods regularly reinforces such strictures, as a massive literature on residential exclusion attests. (Babcock and Bosselman 1973, Scott 1975, Downs 1988, Logan 1977, White 1992, Neiman 1980, Baldassare 1986) It is an all but universal assumption among residents of North American suburbs that their property values and their quality of life will be infringed if their neighbourhood is "invaded" by persons of a "lower" social status than themselves.

It is reasonable to suggest, therefore, that social isolation and racial exclusion, imposed or chosen, is a process that extends across much of urban society, and is not just an imposition upon the inner city. A study that hopes to contribute to an understanding of the policy problems posed by social isolation needs to consider the wider social context of social isolation, and not just demonstrate the isolation of inner city neighbourhoods. **Our third hypothesis, therefore, is that inner city social isolation is part of a wider process of isolation and exclusion that affects affluent neighbourhoods as well as poor ones.**

2.2.0 Question Two: Social dynamics of crime. Are there correlations between incivility, or disorder on one hand and crime rates, social isolation and poverty on the other?

Incivility, or disorder, are defined in the criminology literature by the presence of such behavioural phenomena as public drinking and illegal drinking, gangs (noncriminal activities, such as youths hanging about on street corners), street harassment, drugs (selling and taking) and noisy neighbors; and such physical markers as vandalism, dilapidation, abandonment of buildings and obtrusive presence of rubbish. (Skogan 1990)

Researchers gather data about such phenomena partly through surveys and partly from police records. The social signficiance of disorder is a subject of dispute in the literature. Skogan (1990), for example, finds an ambiguous but interesting relationship between 'neighborhood stability' and disorder, with stability being defined in terms that are closely related to some of the correlates of poverty and affluence that we will be seeking in this study: residential turnover rates and proportion of single-parent families resident in a neighbourhood.

Accoding to Skogan, the "most stable neighborhoods enjoyed low levels of disorder," but he also found that some relatively unstable neighborhoods experienced low levels of disorder. He points to data showing that "affluence helps explain the position of several of the anomalous low-stability, high-income areas." Skogan also found a strong relationship between levels of disorder and the concentration of racial and ethnic minorities in the communities he studied. As we have indicated, another correlate of disorder was poverty.

These are interesting findings. Confirmation or falsification of them in Winnipeg's case would add dimensions to our understanding of processes of decay. Our findings would also enable us to

make contributions to the criminology literature. And we would be able to do this with a minimum of extra research, as the data required are closely related to the data we will be collecting in any event.

3. Research

As indicated above, our research will be based primarily on Statistics Canada census data and police records. In undertaking the Statsistics Canada research, we have gained access to a custom database that is particularly well-suited to our purposes. The regular database is available by census tract, and the boundaries of some tracts are drawn in such a way as to take in areas that are highly disparate. For example, one of the highest-income neighbourhoods in Winnipeg, Armstrong Point, is included in the same tract as an area known to police and the local media as Murder's Half-Acre.

However, since 1976, a custom database has been available that organizes the same data according to so-called neighbourhoods, rather than tracts. The boundaries of the neighbourhoods, defined by Winnipeg's City Planning Department, are drawn according to such criteria as land use (residential, commercial, industrial, etc), density of development, and age and condition of buildings. These neighbourhoods are much more likely to approximate meaningful socio-economic units than the tracts.

We have begun our research by classifying all Winnipeg neighbourhoods according to median household income, and, for our pilot study, have identified the two neighbourhoods with the lowest income, the two nearest the middle and the two at the top. Our next step, to be taken as soon as 1996 data are available, is to select census data that have potential for sheding light on degrees of racial and social isolation, degrees and characteristics of poverty or affluence, and indicators of stability and disorder. Uniformity of income (ie mutual social isolation of the poor and the affluent)

can be determined by calculating standard deviations. Uniformity of ethnicity can be culled from census questions that enquire into ethnicity.

Poverty or well-being data, including data on phenomena accompanying poverty could be garnered from census data on such things as proportions of professionals and of joblessness and female-headed families, housing vacancy rates, proportions of renters. Similar data would used to consider degrees of stability and instability. We will, of course, not start with assumptions about the significance of such neighbourhood characteristics as a particular proportion of female-headed families, renters, or older buildings. But having gathered data on these and other characteristics for neighbourhoods at different income levels, we will be able to draw some conclusions about what their significance in Winnipeg's case, and, subsequently we hope, that of Vancouver and other cities.

Our next step is to gather statistics on crime in the neighbourhoods chosen. Initial explorations suggest that we may have some difficulty matching the police statistics with the neighbourhood boundaries, but so far these difficulties do not seem insurmountable, since police pin-point their statistics in much smaller units than neighbourhoods. Categories of crime covered would include such offences as homicide, sexual assault, break and enter, fraud, vehicle theft, assault, and robbery. Police statistics are also available for such disorder markers as public and illegal drinking, drunkenness, drug use and sale and vandalism. Such indicators as rubbish in the streets and dilapidation may, at a later stage, be collected by surveys of the neighbourhoods under study.

Once again, we do not begin with the assumption that poor people are more prone to vehicle theft, drunkenness or littering than better-off people. Rather, we seek to learn, on a variety of dimensions, what the differences are between living in a decaying inner-city neighbourhood and a more affluent district. The goal of our data-gathering is to generate statistics allowing us to correlate

levels of poverty and affluence in poor, better-off and affluent areas of the city with degrees of social isolation and crime rates. As well, we hope to be able to correlate these indicators with indicators of stability and disorder. We expect that we will be able to compare these data with similar data in American cities to allow us to gain some indications of how well- or badly-off Winnipeg is compared with other North American cities, to better understand the sociol-economic dynamics of the process of inner city decay, to contribute to an established body of sociological theory and empirical investigation, and to make contributions to the policy process.

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